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ABSTRACT

Two studies investigate causal attributions among minority adolescents. The first investigates attributions for the emotions of anger, pride, and guilt among 26 incarcerated male adolescents. Relatively few causes are found for anger and guilt, and a larger variety of causes are cited for pride. A follow-up study then compares causal attributions of 56 incarcerated adolescents with those of 57 secondary school adolescents, both male and female, for the affect of pride. The results show that incarcerated youth typically attribute feelings of pride to activities culturally appropriate for adults. In addition, females cite school success as a source of pride at twice the rate as do males. The importance of this research for understanding the impact of typical life experiences on at-risk youth is discussed. Statistical data are presented in four tables. A 20-item list of references is included. (Author/SLD)

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Attributions for Pride, Anger, and Guilt Among Incarcerated Minority Adolescents

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Abstract

Two studies investigated causal attributions among minority adolescents. Study 1 investigated attributions for the emotions of anger, pride, and guilt among 26 incarcerated male adolescents. Relatively few causes were found for anger and guilt, and a larger variety of causes were cited for pride. A follow-up study then compared causal attributions of 56 incarcerated adolescents with those of 57 secondary school adolescents, both male and female, for the affect of pride. Incarcerated youth typically attributed feelings of pride to activities culturally appropriate for adults. In addition, females cited school success as a source of pride at twice the rate of males. The importance of this research for understanding the impact of typical life experiences on at-risk youth was discussed.

Attributions for Pride, Anger, and Guilt Among Incarcerated Minority Adolescents

Our society has much to gain from a better understanding of the psychological antecedents and conditions of juvenile delinquency. Delinquent youth gangs are an increasingly visible presence in all regions and strata of our society. Serious crimes committed by youth currently extract an incredibly high toll on the lives of both victims and perpetrators alike (Lorion, Tolan, & Wahler, 1987), and ignoring the problem will only escalate that cost. The consistent inability to identify current social, legal or educational interventions which substantially reduce the incidence and/or prevalence of delinquency (Lorion et al., 1987) points to the continuing need for research to identify those factors which can best help society reclaim the lives and talents of youthful offenders while reforming those conditions which led to the expression of antisocial behavior.

Previous research has isolated a number of variables that predict and/or covary with delinquent outcomes during adolescence, including lower than average IQ, low SES, poor reading skills and a specific learning disability (Finn, Stott, & Zarchiny, 1988). Early and pervasive school failure, an obviously related factor, is presently the most consistent precursor of delinquent activity. Additionally, Blacks and Hispanics, particularly males, are at significantly higher risk for identification as delinquent (Grande, 1988). Other indicators of significance include habitual truancy, poverty, and family and environmental disorganization

(Gold, 1987). Finn et al. (1988) suggest a linkage between school failure, disruptive behavior and juvenile delinquency. They hypothesize that constant school failure may lead first to disaffection and then to a search for alternative activities. Their data do not support the reported relationship between low IQ and delinquency. Rather, they found that non-participation in school activities (eg. low class participation, no homework contribution, no extracurricular involvement) was highly correlated with official delinquency.

Research must seek to better understand the associations and relationships represented by these indicators, for they constitute the unique and perhaps defining life experiences of at-risk youth. Previous research on the psychology of juvenile delinquency ranges from the traditional medical model of delinquency as disease (Aichhorn, 1935) to the social learning models of delinquency as environmentally conditioned behavior (e.g., Bandura & Walters, 1959). Recent formulations of social learning theory have included the role of the observer's cognitions in identifying, discriminating, and generalizing behavioral cues emitted by models (Bandura, 1986). This shift to an examination of the individual's social cognitive processes appears to point toward an extremely productive avenue of inquiry into the study of juvenile delinquency. Although few studies to date have examined the social cognitions of delinquents, such research may well generate insights into the mediating intrapsychic processes which give rise to the formal label of delinquent for some, though by no means all, at-

risk youth.

One useful framework for studying the sociocognitive and affective dimensions of formal delinquency has been provided by attribution theory. Attribution theory contends that following outcomes, especially failure and unexpected success, individuals generally consider the question "why". The answers to these questions are causal ascriptions which, in turn, generate specific emotions (Weiner, 1986). If we presume, as attribution theory does, that cognitions precede emotions, and cognitions and emotions together determine future actions, attributionally framed research should lead to a clearer understanding of delinquent behavior. We must look for linkages between typical life experiences encountered by juvenile offenders and the causal attributions and concomitant emotions that accompany such outcomes in the lives of these youth.

In developing a systematic taxonomy of the content of causal thinking, Weiner (1986) identifies three dimensions that describe causal attributions, and links each of these to specific affects. The dimensions are locus, stability, and controllability. The locus dimension, which refers to the location of a perceived cause, influences self-related emotions of pride and self-esteem. For success outcomes, internal attributions of causality should elicit pride. In failure situations, internality means lowered self-esteem. Interestingly, Parrott and Strongman (1984) found a tendency among incarcerated male delinquents to make external attributions for negative outcomes in academic settings. Such a cognitive pattern may be quite adaptive in maintaining one's sense

of self-esteem, while at the same time not always providing a realistic assessment of one's performance. Arbuthnot, Gordon, and Jukorvich, (1987) suggest that when high self concepts are found among delinquents, they "appear to be related to ego defensiveness" (p. 152). Stability refers to the duration of a perceived cause, either temporary (unstable) as in the case of poor preparation or enduring (stable) as in the case of lack of ability. The controllability dimension, which refers to whether or not a perceived cause is under the volitional influence of self or others, differentiates social emotions. The perceived degree of controllability over a particular outcome is hypothesized to determine which of the social emotions (anger, pity, gratitude, guilt, shame) is elicited by that outcome. The emotion of anger is prompted by negative outcomes ascribed to causes controllable by others; guilt stems from negative outcomes controllable by the self (Weiner, 1986). It is thus possible to compare and contrast perceived causes, regardless of their specific content. In addition, the actual location of a particular cause along each of the specific dimensions can vary with the individual. For example, lack of ability might be seen as stable by some, but unstable by someone who has benefitted from educational therapy or training. Knowing how a particular person dimensionalizes a specific cause along these three poles should permit a more accurate understanding of their affective states and/or behavior.

These relationships between causal dimensions and affect have been found to be prevalent (though not invariant) in populations

studied to this point. The research efforts presented here have been undertaken to investigate the relationship between life experiences, perceptions of causality, and affect among incarcerated juvenile offenders. Two investigations are reported: the first describes causal attributions of incarcerated subjects for the emotions of anger, guilt, and pride; the second captures differences in the affect of pride between incarcerated adolescents and a comparison group of secondary school students. The general question addressed was, what kinds of situations elicit anger, guilt, and pride in incarcerated juvenile offenders and are these emotions conceptualized in a manner consistent with attributional theory and previous research?

Experiment 1

Method

Subjects. Participants were 26 male detainees incarcerated in a facility in the western United States and ranging from 14 to 18 years of age (M=16 years, 11 months). All inmates present at the institution's school on the day and time of data collection were included in the sample. According to school records, over half of the sample had most recently resided in welfare dependent households. The overwhelming majority of the sample was comprised of ethnic minorities: 50% (n=13) Hispanic, 35% (n=9) Black, and 15% (n=4) Anglo. All subjects were detained at that time based on criminal activities, including attempted murder, assault and battery, armed robbery, drug sales, auto theft, weapons possession, and burglary.

Procedure. Subjects, in classroom groups of 10-16, were asked to recall a specific situation during which they had experienced the emotion of anger and to write a brief (1-2 sentences) description. They next wrote the main perceived cause of the anger. The stated cause was then rated on the three dimensions of locus, stability and controllability using three separate nine point scales with the following anchors: "inside of me/outside of me"; "lasting/temporary"; and "controllable/uncontrollable". Each rating scale and its respective anchors was defined and elaborated with an accompanying paragraph of description (see Weiner et al., 1982.). This procedure was immediately repeated for the emotions of pride and guilt. Protocols, completed as part of regularly scheduled school periods for all subjects, were introduced by the examiner as an attempt to ascertain information about the general life experiences of today's youth. Students were encouraged to write freely, and anonymity was assured. Each page was read aloud to all subjects, and the examiner was available to answer questions throughout. Subjects expressed minimal uncertainty regarding task requirements, and all possessed basic English literacy skills sufficient to complete the task.

Results and Discussion

Relatively few causes were reported for both anger and guilt in comparison to the variety of causes reported for pride. Subjects cited only three different causes for anger, all related to their interaction with others (see Table 1). Typical examples were: "My mother made me stay at home", "I was mad at my mother and

father when they took my car"; "I got busted", "I got brought in for no reason whatsoever by the police"; and "Some of my enemies shot up my car", "I was mad when my friend got shot from behind." Almost all subjects cited only three types of causes for guilt as well; a single subject cited job loss due to laziness as a cause of guilt (see Table 1). Statements such as "I took a motorcycle, and I feel bad when my Momma found out", "I didn't tell my parents the truth when my friend was in trouble", and "I yelled at my girlfriend and cursed her out when I was high" were typical. Causes of pride were far more diverse; ten different categories are represented (see Table 1). Some typical responses were "I bought my mom a sewing machine", " My friends ask my advice about how to dress and get girls". Only the oldest subjects (18 years) cited pride for traditional school achievement, eg. "I got A's and B's on my report card". In sum, a relatively small number of causal attributions was consistently reported by this population as generating the affects of anger and guilt; however, a far greater diversity of causes was shown to elicit pride.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Dimension ratings were analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA, with emotion as the repeated fáctor. For each of the emotions, subjects rated their cited cause of that emotion on the three causal dimensions of locus, stability, and controllability (see Table 2). A significant main effect for affect was found for

the dimensions of locus, $F(2,50)=5.45$, $p<.05$ and stability, $F(2,50)=4.7$, $p<.05$. Locus ratings were significantly more internal for pride and guilt than for anger. In other words, youth reported that causes of anger were relatively more external to themselves or determined largely by environmental factors when compared to causes of pride and guilt. Within the stability dimension, causes for anger were seen as significantly less stable than for either pride or guilt. The finding that reported causes for anger were viewed by these young people as transient in comparison to reported causes of guilt or pride is a positive one, indicating a lack of pervasive rage as a determinant of behavior. Differences between pride and guilt were non-significant. Differences between emotions for the controllability dimension were non-significant.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Overall incarcerated male delinquents dimensionalize emotions as predicted by attribution theory, though the content of their causal thinking is clearly different. Linkages predicted between causal attributions, dimension ratings and reports of specific affects are borne out for these adolescent males. For example, internality is clearly related to the self-directed emotions of pride and guilt, and clearly not associated with anger. As predicted, causes for both anger and guilt are rated as controllable. The most interesting finding from this initial investigation is the great diversity of cited causes for pride in

comparison to the relatively narrow range of causes cited for the other two affects. This broader range coupled with a possible age variation in pride related to school success led to the decision to pursue research on the affect of pride with a larger and more differentiated sample of adolescents.

Experiment #2

Method

Subjects. Participants in the second investigation were 56 incarcerated youth, and 57 youth attending secondary school in the greater Los Angeles area. All incarcerated youth present at two adjacent schools at a single detention site were included in the sample. Three social studies classes at a public secondary school site (grades 7-12) were selected at random for inclusion. Demographically, the students were lower SES; approximately 35% qualify for the free lunch program. All students present in the three classes on the day of data collection for whom parental consent had been received participated in the study. Subjects ranged from 11 to 18 years of age for the incarcerated group (M=16.62, sd=1.85) and 12 to 19 years of age for the secondary school subjects (M=16.65, sd=1.98). Both samples were largely composed of ethnic minorities. In the incarcerated sample, 48.2% (n=27) were Hispanic, 37.5% (n 21) were Black, and 14.3% (n=8) were Anglo. In the secondary school sample 40.4% (n=23) were Hispanic, 47.3% (n=27) were Black, and 12.3% (n=7) were Anglo. The incarcerated and secondary school groups included both males and females, though the two groups differed significantly in gender

composition: X (1, N=113) =11.0, p<.01. Males constituted 71% (n=40) of the incarcerated and 39% (n=22) of the comparison group.

Procedure. As in Experiment 1, subjects were asked to recall a specific situation during which they had experienced the emotion of pride and to write a brief description. They then specified the perceived cause and rated that causal ascription on the three dimensions of locus, stability, and controllability. As in the previous study, protocols were completed during regularly scheduled school periods for all subjects, either in high school classes or within the institution's school, and the same introduction and instructions were given.

Results and Discussion

All responses were subjected to a content analysis and classified according to the categories listed in Table 3. As can be seen, causes most frequently eliciting pride included individual accomplishments, school success, affiliative success, and employment. Individual accomplishments were defined as causes of pride other than school or affiliative success that are the direct result of behavior or characteristics of the respondent. Table 3 reveals differences in the frequency of responses between the two groups for several of the categories. For example, school success

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INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

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is cited by the incarcerated sample about half as frequently as the school sample.

The data were subsequently analyzed separately by gender. For purposes of additional statistical analysis, categories containing fewer than five responses were combined to meet assumptions of the X statistic: helping others combined with affiliative success, employment and material possessions with individual accomplishments, and accomplishments of team with accomplishments of others. These categories were then analyzed to examine both gender and group effects.

Turning first to gender effects, males and females differed significantly in frequencies of categories cited for pride: X (3, N=113) =8.19, $p<.05$. Females cited school success as a source of pride twice as frequently as did males, regardless of condition of incarceration (Males=15%, Females=33%). In addition, all males reported individual accomplishments as a source of pride at rates nearly double that of females (Males=60%, Females=35%). In essence, males favored individual accomplishments as sources of pride while females favored school success. Separate analyses of the responses for each status group demonstrated that the two groups of males differed significantly in identified causes for pride: X (3, n=62) =9.8, $p<.05$. A majority (70%) of responses from incarcerated males fell in to the category of individual accomplishments compared to a minority (41%) of the school sample. Females did not differ significantly by status of incarceration. A log linear model which tested the interaction between gender and status of incarceration was also significant: likelihood ratio X (9, N=113) =44.5, $p<.001$. Clearly, responses from incarcerated

males favored the category of individual accomplishments.

The category of individual accomplishments accounted for almost half (44.6%) of all responses in the incarcerated sample and slightly more than one third (35% total) of all responses for the school sample (see Table 3). Specific examples from this category for the incarcerated sample included caring for self when adults are unable or unwilling (12 responses), assuming adult responsibilities when adults are unskilled or incapacitated (5 responses), and successful tenure while incarcerated (4 responses). The school sample included athletic accomplishments (8 responses), church related activities (4 responses), musical/artistic talent (3 responses), and successful emigration (5 responses). The incarcerated youth reported individual accomplishments that are strikingly different from those reported by the school group. The single largest group of responses, caring for self, was not represented in the school group at all, whose responses were more typical of adolescent activities.

A closer inspection of this difference in content yielded another way of conceptualizing the differences between the two groups. All responses were divided into situations culturally defined as adult concerns and those more appropriate for youth. Criteria for adult context designation included direct responsibility for subsistence or survival, primary care for the well-being of dependent others, and instrumental communication with community agencies. A random sample of 53% of the protocols was categorized by a second reviewer who was blind to the intent of the

study. Inter-rater agreement was 97%.

Using this dichotomy, the incarcerated sample reported 34 instances (61%) of pride evoked in adult-like contexts (see Table 4). Typical responses included having a baby, maintaining an apartment, providing for younger siblings, and seeking help for the drug problems of parents. In contrast, the school sample reported only eight instances (14%). Incarcerated youth responses were significantly different from school youth: X (1, N=113) =24.4, $p<.01$. Separate analyses by gender yielded significant results for both males (X [1, n=62] =10.6, $p<.01$) and females (X [1, n=51] =10.1, $p<.01$). A log linear analysis to test a possible interaction between gender and status of incarceration also proved significant: likelihood ratio X (3, N=113) = 35.2 $p< .001$. Analysis of frequencies and residuals revealed that, among all groups of subjects, responses designated as adult contexts were most prevalent for incarcerated males. Simply stated, incarcerated

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INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

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youth experienced pride largely in contexts that might be defined as premature for their chronological age and presumed level of maturity. The incarcerated sample appears to be a group of young people who have been placed into adult contexts very early in life, either by choice or by circumstance.

Turning to the ratings for causal dimensions, ratings for locus, stability and controllability did not differ according to

status of incarceration. Delinquents did not differ from other adolescents in perceiving pride as a function of personal attributes that are relatively enduring and under the volitional control of the individual. However, a significant main effect of gender emerged on the stability dimension ($F=5.6$, $p<.05$). Causal attributions for pride were significantly more stable for females ($M=3.2$) than for males ($M=4.3$). Attribution theory (Weiner, 1986) states that the perceived stability of a cause determines one's expectancy of the recurrence of the particular outcome for which the causal attribution was made. Outcomes attributed to stable causes are expected to recur, while those attributed to unstable causes are viewed with uncertainty of future prospects. One interpretation of the gender difference therefore is that males in general are less certain that events eliciting pride will recur in the future. They may be less certain that the affect of pride will retain a permanent place in their life experiences.

General Discussion

Data presented here support the hypothesis that incarcerated delinquents dimensionalize their causal attributions similar to other populations studied to date. In the initial investigation, causes for anger were seen as significantly more external than either pride or guilt, as would be predicted by attribution theory. In addition, causes for all three emotions were rated as controllable. Thus, the linkages between dimensions and emotions as discussed in the introduction appears to hold for this population as well.

However, additional research seemed indicated based on the content of causal thinking for pride elicited in study #1. Pride generated the greatest diversity of causes, and suggested a possible age difference. As noted earlier, only the oldest subjects seemed to cite pride for traditional school achievement. The more youthful offenders have probably been in school more consistently in their recent past, yet they ignored this activity which should be an important area for achievement during adolescence. Are these male youth indeed less concerned with school success, and is this fact explanatory of their presence in a juvenile facility at such a young age? Such an interpretation is consistent with Finn et al.'s findings (1988) of pervasive non-participation in school activities by delinquents. Lack of attention to school success as suggested in this investigation may be indicative of lack of participation by the youthful offenders. This initial effort to pursue research questions framed in an attributional perspective proved sufficiently fruitful to warrant the second study, focusing on the emotion of pride.

The incarcerated youth in study #2 did in fact respond with school relevant situations at rates similar to a group of secondary school youth when the effects of gender were accounted for, an intriguing finding for this particular group. Females cited school success as a source of pride twice as frequently as did males and rated causes of pride as significantly more stable. If achievement-related pride is an indicator of perceived importance of school activities, one might conclude from these results that

school success is more relevant for minority adolescent females that for males. Reed (1988), in discussing the particular problems of Black adolescent males, suggests that typical public high schools with high minority enrollment in low-income areas may not be receptive to the academic strivings of these young men due to the "negative attitudes and low expectations held by school officials" (p. 81). Rather than seek opportunities to experience pride within the inhospitable school context, some youth "reject the outward manifestation of being smart in the formal classroom since their efforts may not be recognized, rewarded or encouraged" (Reed, 1988, p. 81). His conclusions appear appropriate for Hispanic youth as well.

Some minority adolescent males turn instead to peer group activities in the larger community. These males have an alternative range of contexts in which to succeed and experience pride. Again, these findings mirror the results of Finn et al. (1988), who also surmise that delinquent youth have rejected the school context in favor of peer activities. This range of competing contexts may minimize the importance of school success for adolescent boys in a manner that is less often characteristic for girls. For example, responses designated as adult contexts are indeed represented in all categories of subjects, but the disparity is most striking for incarcerated (60%) vs. secondary school (11%) males. Left unanswered is the question of why some adolescents achieve formal status as incarcerated delinquents, while others of seemingly similar life circumstances do not.

Finally, the expectation that pride would be rated as internal and controllable at equivalent rates across all groups of young people is borne out. No differences emerged in the analysis of locus and controllability ratings according to condition of incarceration. Subjects indeed dimensionalized causes of pride as under their own volitional control. However, significant age and gender differences which did emerge may point out important directions for future research.

In this report, causal ascriptions among two groups of adolescents have been analyzed according to attribution theory, which captures important similarities and differences between the two groups. The affect of pride seems equally related to qualities of the self for both groups, but is elicited by vastly different circumstances. However, the analysis has been conducted entirely on retrospective data. The use of retrospective data might be seen as problematic in seeking a causal relationship between attributions, affect, and delinquency. Future research may need to consider additional methodologies to complement the study of the social cognitive bases of juvenile delinquency.

Insights into the attributional processes of juvenile offenders may provide valuable guidance for efforts to stem the rising tide of juvenile crime and violence. Society must find meaningful interventions that are predicated on an enhanced understanding of the lives of youthful offenders, and attribution theory may provide a much needed theoretical framework to guide basic research.

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Table 1

Causes Cited for Anger, Pride, and Guilt

Affect	Cause	%	n (N=26)
Anger			
	Actions of others	46%	12
	Arrest	34%	9
	Restrictions	20%	5
Pride			
	Attractive girlfriend	19%	5
	Esteem of peers	15%	4
	Material possessions	15%	4
	School success	11%	3
	Freedom from jail	8%	2
	Siblings	8%	2
	Helping others	8%	2
	Sports skills	8%	2
	Obedience to parents	4%	1
	Employment	4%	1
Guilt			
	Breaking the law	46%	12
	Lying	31%	8
	Treatment of girlfriend	19%	5
	Employment	4%	1

Table 2

Mean Dimension Ratings of Cited Causes

	Dimensions		
Affect	Locus	Stability	Control
Anger	5.385[a]	6.154[a]	2.692[a]
Pride	3.385[b]	3.923[b]	3.796[a]
Guilt	3.385[b]	4.885[b]	3.192[a]

Note. Scores range from 1-9. Low numbers indicate greater internality, stability, and controllability. Means in each column with different superscripts are significantly different ($p<.05$) using Tukey's HSD test.

Table 3

Cited causes for pride

Causes	%	n
Incarcerated youth (n=56)		
Individual accomplishments	44.6	25
Affiliative success	17.9	10
School success	16.1	9
Employment	10.7	6
Helping others	5.3	3
Material possessions	3.6	2
Secondary school youth (n=57)		
Individual accomplishments	35.0	20
School success	30.0	17
Affiliative success	16.0	9
Team/group accomplishments	8.7	5
Accomplishments of others	5.2	3

Note. Categories containing a single response are not listed: accomplishments of others (incarcerated) and employment, helping others, and material possessions (school).

Table 4

Adult Contexts Cited as Causes of Pride

Causes	n*
Incarcerated youth	
Full employment for self-support	6
Financial support for unemployed parent	5
Becoming a parent	5
Functioning as head of household	4
Getting/Keeping marital partner	4
Seeking help for parent's drug problem	4
Assuming full care of younger sibling(s)	3
Designation as a trusty while incarcerated	3
Secondary school youth	
Becoming a parent	4
Responsible contact with welfare/social security	2
Financial support for unemployed parent	1
Assuming full care of younger sibling	1

*Total responses for incarcerated group=34. Total responses for school group=8.